

D. Hart
Brigham Young University

The Semantic Development of the Cognates Russian *комната* 'room' – English *chimney*

Diachronic semantics has traditionally been limited to analysis of real and reconstructed definitions of lexical items. This approach parallels diachronic phonology, where shifts in sounds must be oriented toward discrete lexical items for purposes of establishing common identity through time or across dialects and languages. This article suggests that, while lexical identity is crucial in establishing phonological cognates, cognitive identity, rather than lexical identity, can be shown in some cases to drive semantic change. The approach discussed here has implications for determining the validity of proposed etymologies.

Etymology is the science of “true meaning”, yet the etymological initiative during most of its existence has focused primarily on reconstructed phonological histories of words while often ignoring meaning. This was recognized a hundred years ago by E. Tappolet (1905: 77-78): “Bedarf nicht auch die begriffliche Seite einer Etymologie des ausdruecklichen Nachweises? Und ist nicht etwa dieser begriffliche Nachweis ebenso notwendig zur Richtigkeit der Etymologie wie der lautliche Nachweis?” [“Don’t we also need the conceptual part of etymology? And is not this conceptual proof just as necessary for arriving at a correct etymology as is the phonetic proof?”] Attempts in the first half of the 20th century to introduce a workable system of meaning analysis within etymology paralleling phonological processes consistently failed to recapture “the intention of the name-giver”. This, in turn, led to a “more resigned attitude” of etymologists in making statements about meaning change, let alone original “true meaning,” leading to “extreme scepticism” about the results of the etymological process (Szemerényi 1961: 288-9). We therefore find that, while many of the details of historical phonology dealing with the

development of the modern European languages have been worked out, the same cannot be said for our understanding of semantics and diachronic semantics, which, though visible in their effects, have proven elusive in their mechanisms.

The development of cognitive linguistics and cognitive semantics in the second half of the 20th century provides investigators with a powerful tool for understanding lexical meaning and how it changes. Based primarily on the theoretical framework of Geeraerts (1997), Langacker (1987), and Taylor (2002), this article reviews the semantic developments found in the cognate pair Modern Russian (MR) *комната* 'room' and Modern English (ME) *chimney*, both from Latin *caminus* 'forge, stove'. These widely accepted cognates can easily be verified by their respective phonological histories. But how can we understand the significant shift in meaning that must have occurred in the development of both modern words? The traditional way of understanding the disparity in meaning associated with these words relies on fixed definitions rather than on speakers' perceptions. Greater insight may be possible, at least in the case of these cognates, by basing our investigation in a cognitive model of lexical meaning shift.

Etymology is concerned with determining the synchronic or the diachronic identity of words. Identification has traditionally involved the phonologically lawful association of sounds and combinations of sounds through time. However, the semantic identity of cognates has been established on the basis of lexical definitions and on researchers' intuitions about the adequacy of proposed semantic relationships (Malkiel 1968: 352). In traditional etymological essays the phonetic composition of an attested or reconstructed form has been seen as primary, while a word's definition was analyzed as an important but secondary and only supporting element. In the cognitive analysis employed here, meaning is primary.

A definition may be seen as a list of contexts in which a word commonly appears (Sørensen 1970: 74). However, in the cognitive view meaning is primary and words and definitions are secondary. This will have interesting implications when semantic shift is viewed as a change in speakers' perceived reality. Diachronic semantics then asks, what did speakers make of this change? Did they do nothing, did they change a word to

express their altered perceptions (if so, how and why), or did they borrow a word to express the new development, or did they do something else?

Once perceptions of the world change, what happens to lexical meaning? Traditionally etymologists have accounted for meaning change by comparing definitions of meanings of two or more phonologically related words. Any observed diachronic alteration in a word's meaning was then accounted for by asserting that later definitions proceeded from earlier ones. Common types of shifts in definitions were characterized as the results of "generalization" or "specification". This approach can lead to incorrect conclusions, however, as will be shown below.

Here we adopt the distinction between onomasiology and semasiology as provided by Geeraerts (1997: 17): onomastics has to do with the way names are associated with bits of perceived reality taking into consideration salient aspects of that reality in a given time and place. Semasiology deals with meaning in just the opposite way. In semasiology a word is analyzed for the meanings it may represent and the way those meanings may change. Onomastics has to do with initial processes, semasiology with results. Finally, we take as axiomatic that lexical meaning changes due to perceived communicative deficiencies due to

- (a) an alteration in the encyclopedic knowledge of speakers
- (b) an alteration in contexts associated with a given lexical item (metaphor)

In (a), speakers become aware of something different in their lives, such as an innovation in technology. A good example of this is a change due to discovery or invention. In (b), a word is used in an unexpected context which the hearer attempts to make sense of (find a network or set of networks which are compatible), such as occurs in figurative speech (as "burn" in "I have money to burn.").

With this as background, let us examine an example of how meaning development is analyzed within this generalized cognitive framework. The main question we will want to answer is, how does using this framework make transparent the differences in meaning between MR *комната* and ME *chimney*? Etymologists have traced the ancestor of both words to Latin *caminus* 'oven, forge, firepit' (Chernykh 1994: 419, Barnhart 1988: 166). In these etymologies the intuitive relationship between the

definitions ‘oven, firepit’ and ‘chimney’ is assumed to validate the proposed cognates, but this does not specify the nature of the relationship. The relationship between MR *комната* and ‘oven, firepit’ is also intuitively acceptable when, as is usually done in traditional etymologies, the Vulgar Latin *caminata* ‘room with a fireplace’ is cited as an intermediate stage between the Latin and the MR word. The traditional approach is sketched out in (1) and (2), as given in Vasmer, Chernykh, the OED and Barnhart:

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|-----|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) | Greek <i>kaminos</i> ‘oven, furnace, kiln’ | was borrowed into |
| | Latin <i>caminus</i> ‘oven, forge, firepit’ | which became |
| | VLatin <i>caminata</i> ‘room with a fireplace’ | which was borrowed into |
| | MHG <i>kemenate</i> ‘room with a fireplace’ | which was borrowed into |
| | MR <i>комната</i> ‘room’ | |
| (2) | Greek <i>kaminos</i> ‘oven, furnace, kiln’ | was borrowed into |
| | Latin <i>caminus</i> ‘oven, forge, firepit’ | which became |
| | VLatin <i>caminata</i> ‘room with a fireplace’ | which became |
| | OF <i>cheminee</i> ‘fireplace, chimney’ | which was borrowed into |
| | OE <i>chytenay</i> ‘chimney’ | |

(For the purposes of this article, single quotes will be used for definitions, square brackets for perceived referents.) While the connection between each level listed in (1) and (2) is intuitively satisfying, there are three important semantic leaps involved in these etymologies that are not transparent. The first involves the shift of the sense [forge, oven, firepit] to that of [room with a fireplace] as illustrated in (1). The second sense alteration, also in (1), deals with a shift from the referent [room with a fireplace] to simply any [room], as found in MR. The third semantic leap is illustrated in (2), where the sense [room with a fireplace] somehow came to refer to [chimney].

In the first shift, we observe Latin *caminus* at the base of VLatin *caminata*. The Vulgar Latin suffix –ata formed perfect participles, and could be added to nouns (Grandgent 2002: 21), as in the present instance, producing something along the lines of [fireplaced]. In cognitive semantics the shift in definitions from ‘oven’ to ‘room with a fireplace’ does not represent a likely onomastic process. Instead, the shift in question is

viewed from the point of view of how the world is perceived. The question is, what happened in the world that caused speakers' perceptions to change so dramatically as to require the introduction of a new word into their speech?

The root of the word that earlier referred to [fireplace] was used to express the new development. However, the sense, the actual referent of the word and its root did not change at all. The innovation that took place did not occur in the semantic domain of [fireplace], rather it occurred in the semantic domain of [room]. The shift in meaning that took place had to do with the possible attributes connected in this network. The semantic shift here has nothing to do with the root CAMIN-, or the word *caminus* or its associated definitions. It has to do with the kind of rooms a building may have. In other words, the semantic shift in question is unrelated to the sequence of sound CAMIN-, but rather is related to the sense of [room, apartment, chamber], namely a specific kind of room, one equipped with a fireplace, a room that has been *fireplaced*. It is in this domain that perceptions of speakers changed, not that of [fireplace].

In the traditional semasiological, account, the sense [fireplace] is expanded somehow become [room with a fireplace]. While some structural commonalities between a fireplace and a room may exist, they are likely not salient, but retractive, trivial, or coincident. Since the semasiological approach focusses on definition, it must incorrectly (at least in this case) characterize the synchronic shift in meaning.

In the cognitive approach, it is incorrect to assert that the referent [fireplace] became a different object simply by adding the suffix *-ata* to the root *camin*. The object [fireplace] continued in use through the middle ages, surfacing as MF *cheminee* 'chimney', MG *Kamin* 'fireplace, chimney', Spanish *chimenea* 'fireplace', Portuguese *chamine* ≅ 'chimney' and English *chimney*. The word also entered Russian, possibly through German, as *камин* 'fireplace'. In these languages the change that did occur was that of the referent [fireplace] to [chimney], discussed below.

The semantic shift from Middle High German (MHG) *kemenate* 'room with a fireplace' to MR *комната* 'room' appears to present a good example of "generalization", a traditional typological category of meaning change. Indeed, the shift in lexical meaning 'room with a fireplace' to simply 'room' does appear on its face to represent a simple generalization. This characterization, however, rests on the assumption that the definition

‘room with a fireplace’ was borrowed along with the word into Russian (whether from MHG or via Polish), and was subsequently simplified, i.e. generalized, to ‘room’. In fact, the evidence suggests that the referent [with a fireplace] never played a role in the meaning of this word in Russian.

What perceptions did the phonetic sequence in Medieval Russian *комната* represent? What communicative deficiency developed in the speech of medieval Russians that made the importation of this word into Russian desirable? Questions such as these help us come to a more significant understanding of the cognitive events that etymology attempts to capture.

In the present case, a phonological sequence akin to MHG *kemenate* was imported into Medieval Russian, but its associated reference, namely [room with a fireplace] was not. Instead a communicative deficiency had developed in Russian, specifically, how to name the new structures that were being built (mostly of stone) within a courtyard and often attached to buildings already located in courtyards. These structures were rarely (if ever) equipped with a fireplace. When used as a bedroom or reception room, these structures were heated with the traditional stove (печь), but most often had no heating at all, as when used as storerooms or summer bedrooms. In contexts of peasant living areas, the phonological sequence was recruited to refer to structures attached to an изба ‘hut’. The first references we have to *комната* suggest that this word was originally used to name a stone structure of relatively significant proportions:

(3) Того же лѣта (6948) постави владыка комнату камену меншую.

“In the same year 1440 the Bishop set up a stone komnata.” (Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’: 421)

(4) Того же лѣта (6950) постави архиепископъ владыка Еуфимей поварнѣ камены и комнату каменну въ своемъ дворѣ. “In the same year 1142 Bishop Eufimej set up a stone kitchen and a stone komnata in the courtyard” (Novgorodskaya pervaja letopis’: 423)

Prior to the 15th-16th centuries, Russian habitations were virtually all made of wood, including the peasant изба as well as the buildings within the boyar’s or merchant’s courtyard. However starting around the 15th century and starting in Novgorod, buildings

began to be built from stone. (Rabinovich 1969:272) and this quickly spread to Moscow (Kostomarov 1993: 55-56). Kostomarov (1993: 59-60) further states, “У простолюдинов избы были черные, то есть курные, без труб...при собственно так называемых избах были пристройки, называемые комнатами. ...К избам приделывались разные пристенки и прирубки. У зажиточных крестьян, кроме изб, были горницы на подклети с комнатами, то есть двухэтажные домики...Даже у царей было только четыре покая: передняя, крестовая, комната (кабинет) и спальня.” This suggests that *комната* referred to a separate, although often attached, structure, most often, at least initially, made of stone. The structure served numerous purposes, including storerooms, bedrooms, visiting rooms, and in fact could serve any purpose.

We can be fairly certain that the referent [fireplace], which was salient in the meaning of the MHG word (Kirschstein 1991:992), was clearly not borrowed when the word was recruited into 16th century Russian. Instead Russians foregrounded the references [stone], perhaps [relatively small], and [attached]. This suggestion finds support in the fact that fireplaces (of the western sort) did not come into frequent use in Russia until the 17th century and then only in palaces.

The 16th century Russian lexicon was rich in specific names for various kinds of rooms, but possibly because these names were object specific, none of them fit the new invention: a free-standing stone structure or structure attached to an *изба* or other building that could be used for a number of purposes. Russians borrowed MHG *keminate*, but not the definition ‘room with a fireplace’. Instead the borrowed word was applied to a new invention, a [stone room], where a backgrounded and trivially associated sense connected to the source word was foregrounded. By the 17th century it had displaced the native but polysemic *покой* (cf MR *покой* ‘rest, peace’) as the default for referring to any room.

The stone structures referred to above were never added to church buildings of worship. It is not surprising, then, that *комната* is not used today to refer to rooms in church buildings. Instead either the specific name of the room is used (e.g., *ризница* ‘sacristy’) or the generic *помещение* ‘area, accommodation, room’ is used.

Traditional etymology insists that the definition ‘room with a fireplace’ was generalized to ‘room’ in Russian. This statement may be accepted in the widest view, but

there is no evidence that the sense [with a fireplace] was ever salient with this word when spoken by Russians. Instead Russians focussed on extended domains of references associated with the given source word.

The non-specific, non-predetermined usage of *комната* made it more reflective of the general [room]: any walled-in space within a larger structure. In this meaning it displaced the polysemic *покой*, which could refer to any living area, but not to storerooms, kitchens (*поварня*), cellars (*подклеть*), etc. The word *комната*, unspecified for room use, became schematic for all instances within the domain and by doing so displaced *покой*. Within a schema units at a basic level differ significantly from one another, while above the basic level exhibit “comparatively few namable attributes at all. Units at the basic level are therefore maximally contrastive, and maximally informative” (Taylor 2002: 132). In the present case, *комната* is above the basic level, exhibiting few namable attributes, while instances for it (*спальня*, *кухня*, *витальня*) are basic and maximally informative.

Traditionally the words *покой* ‘living room’ and *комната* ‘room with a fireplace’ contain opposing definitions making it unlikely that one could serve as a subset of the other. Further it appears that since *комната* is more specific (with the traditional definition), it should have been encompassed in *покой*, an incorrect prediction. The affiliation of a given lexical network with a number of other networks resulted in the former encompassing the latter, with the result that some of its salient features ([stone], [attached]) became recessive.

Cognitive diachronic semantics suggests a method for understanding the motivation behind the adoption of *комната* in 17th century Russian. Aspects of cognitive semantics also help clarify *how* the sense of ME *chimney* developed from Latin *caminus*. The widely accepted explanation of the semantic shift illustrated in (2) involves the identification of Vulgar Latin *caminata* ‘room with a fireplace’ as the source of OF *cheminee* ‘fireplace’, hence ME *chimney* (Barnhart 1988:166; see also the entry under *chimney* in Merriam-Webster’s New College Dictionary). However, exactly how *cheminee* was derived from *caminata* is not part of the description. It is exactly this kind of imprecision that moved etymology beyond the realm of strict scientific linguistics. In fact, in the present case, there is no need to try to derive OF *cheminee* from *caminata*.

Instead, as discussed by Rey (1992:404), OF *cheminee* derives from the past passive participle of OF *caminare* ‘to make a fireplace, hollow out in the shape of a fireplace’. Rey suggests that the new *meaning* was not connected with a shift in an antecedent *word* (although he does point out the existence of *caminata*) but rather with the implementation of a new word, namely the past passive participle OF **caminee*, which produces OF *cheminee* by regular phonological processes (Boyd-Bowman 1980: 7, 15). Rey (1992: 404) states that initially this word was polysemic, “cheminée s’est restreint dès l’ancien français (fin xiie s.) au sens moderne, désignant soit tout le dispositif, soit, une de ses parties (âtre, encadrement de l’âtre ou partie visible sur le toit qui évacue la fumée.” We can be certain that since English has initial [č], this word was borrowed into English sometime between the 12th to 13th century, since [č] in OF shifted to [š] by the end of the 13th century.

As shown by Kövecses and Radden (1998:39), speakers commonly use metonymy as a strategy for naming a referent by focussing on a conceptually contiguous aspect of that referent. I suggest that is exactly what happened when 13th century English speakers sought to name a device being used to move smoke from a fire.

As we observed in the borrowing of *комната* into Russian, *cheminee* entered English with a very specific sense. Rather than borrowing the various referents attached to this word in OF, English simply borrowed one referent, [the flue] of a fireplace. English already had a good word for fireplace, namely, *hearth* ‘that part of the floor on which a fire is made, or which is beneath the fire-basket or grate; the paved or tiled floor of a fireplace’ (Oxford English Dictionary 1989), but no word for a flue connected to a house. While OF *cheminee* was polysemic, English speakers foregrounded and made salient a recessive or secondary referent, namely ‘flue, smoke-duct’ that was connected with *cheminee*. This evidence suggests that etymologies that connect *caminata* with *cheminee* in any but the most trivial way miss the mark.

The cognitive approach provides a viable and empirical framework for understanding the development of meaning in Russian *комната* and its cognate partner *chimney*. This approach affirms that these are verifiable cognates, and that their semantic development rests on perceptions of how the world changed and how the lexicons of speakers separated by a continent were altered to reflect these changes. Common

onomastic strategies were used in naming these innovations. Interestingly enough, both Russian and English speakers used the strategy of foregrounding non-salient references in their naming. Traditional analyses of these words, based on intuitions about what is possible in the diachronic alteration of a word's definition, either fall short of explaining how meaning changed, or suggest faulty developments. Cognitive semantics provides a methodology that allows researchers to focus on actual and perceived events which triggered communicative deficiencies. Cognitive based etymology attempts to understand how speakers resolve these deficiencies and may therefore prove to be a useful instrument in the etymological endeavor.

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